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ABSTRACT

The outcome of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services (ICNBS) held in November 1998 was a set of revised recommendations for the national bibliography, its basis, scope, and production. After a brief introduction to the concept of national bibliography and former recommendations for national bibliographic services, this paper presents the major changes introduced by the new recommendations. Changes compared with the 1977 recommendations are summarized in the following areas: legal deposit; coverage of the national bibliography; presentation and timeliness of the national bibliography; international standards used; and future activities. (Author/MES)

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ICNBS 1998
New Recommendations for the National Bibliography

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Abstract

The outcome of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services (ICNBS) held in November 1998 is a set of revised recommendations for the national bibliography, its basis, scope and production. After a brief introduction to the concept of national bibliography and former recommendations for national bibliographic services, the paper presents the major changes introduced by the new recommendations

Paper

Introduction

Representatives of national libraries and national bibliographic agencies from more that 70 countries all over the world were gathered when the *International Conference on National Bibliographic Services* (ICNBS) was held in Copenhagen in November 1998. The conference was initiated and planned by IFLA's Division on Bibliographic Control and the Section on National Libraries in co-operation with the IFLA UBCIM Office, and it was held under the auspices of IFLA and the Royal Library, the Royal School of Library and Information Science and the Danish Library Centre in Denmark (1). The aim of the conference was to review and update the recommendations of the 1977 International Congress on National Bibliographies in the light of new developments.

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National Bibliography

"The primary sources for all types of bibliography are the national bibliographies, i.e. each country's records of the literature that is published or have been published within the borders of that country. Only when this material has been obtained, can we say that it is possible to find the part of the whole world's production that is needed in the individual cases" [from Danish] (8, p. 299).

The quoted text dates back from 1959 and it reflects the fact that the information carriers at that time predominantly were "literature" (i.e. books and periodicals). If the word "literature" is replaced by "documents" this brief description of the aim of the national bibliography corresponds very well with the ideas expressed by the IFLA programme for UBC: Universal Bibliographic Control (3). The UBC programme aims at a world wide network of national bibliographies to secure a basic standardised registration of - and through that a possibility for retrieval of - documents published all over the world. Besides that, the national bibliography has a specific national significance expressed by UNESCO and IFLA in *Guidelines for the National Bibliographic Agency and the National Bibliography* (7, p. 12):

"The improvement of national bibliographic control also has its own special significance and value within each country:

- *to discover, identify and record all publications produced in a country; in order to build up the national library and archival collections;*
- *to satisfy the information needs of the national;*
- *to contribute to the development of an integrated library, documentation and archival infrastructure"*

And its practical function is to be a tool for selection and acquisition of material as well as for information retrieval. Besides, the national bibliographic registration may function as a model for library cataloguing and on a long view act as retrospective national bibliography and, finally, serve as a source of information on the social, cultural and economical development of the country. Expressed by Barbara Bell as: *"A current national bibliography is a mirror that reflects the culture, character and current interest of a country by listing its publishing output. Not only does it serve as an historical recorder, but when distributed to other countries, it serves as a "window" to that country"* (5, p. 29).

International Recommendations

The national bibliography defined as a system or as a national bibliographic service is fairly new. The expression "national bibliography" appears in the literature about the middle of the previous century - primarily as a designation of the national book list. It is not until the first half of this century that the present broad definition is recognised. An important basis for this "new" perception is the international conferences arranged by UNESCO and IFLA. The outcomes of these conferences are sets of recommendations, which have had - and will have in the future, I am sure - a strong influence on the development of national bibliographic services around the world. Cf. Bell (4).

The first of these conferences was arranged by UNESCO in 1950 (6). The theme of the conference was bibliographic services in general, but with national bibliographic services as one of the main issues. The recommendations (resolutions) from the conference point out that a national bibliography is not only a single bibliography. It is a system of bibliographies listing the different types of documents published in the country. It is worth noticing that the recommendations mention that not only book material but also audio-visual material published in the country should be subject to the national bibliographic registration. Besides very detailed recommendations about the types of document that should be listed in the national bibliography, the 1950 conference includes only brief remarks on such issues as level of

bibliographic description, publication and frequency of the national bibliography.

The UNESCO recommendations from 1950 are now being cited very rarely in the literature. They have been superseded by the recommendations from 1977. Still, they are worth remembering because they became of significance by showing that the national bibliography is not just a book list but a system of bibliographies and by introducing the concept of "national bibliographic service".

The outcome of the following IFLA/UNESCO conference in 1977 was published in *Guidelines for the National Bibliographic Agency and the National Bibliography* (7). It includes a set of recommendations on issues such as legal deposit, selection of material, level of description and presentation, and frequency of the printed national bibliography. According to *Guidelines* the national bibliography is defined as *"... the cumulation of the authoritative and comprehensive records of the national imprint of a country, published in a printed form (and/or produced in other physical form, such as catalogue cards, machine-readable tapes) regularly, and with the least possible delay"* (7, p. 4). Interpretations of "national imprint" may vary from country to country but according to *Guidelines* a country's national imprint is defined as the *"products of the national publishing industry"*, i.e. documents published in the country.

In many ways there are great differences between the two sets of recommendations. While the 1950 conference makes a point of listing the different types of document to be covered by the national bibliography, the IFLA/UNESCO recommendations from 1977 indicate a minimum of coverage:

"National bibliographies, as a minimum, should include the records for monographs and first issues and title changes of serials, including official publications, of the national imprint; and other categories should be included as rapidly as possible to meet the requirements of the national library community and the resources of the national bibliographic agency ..." (7, Recommendation 5).

In the text, however, it is pointed out that *"... the definition of national imprint clearly includes:*

- *publications produced by minority ethnic groups within a country appearing in languages and /or scripts different from those in general use in the country;*
- *the official and semi-official publications produced by government ministries and departments and by official councils, research institutes, etc.;*
- *printed non-text publications, such as maps, music, etc.;*
- *non-text publications: that is, non-book and/or audio-visual materials, such as films, cassettes, video-tapes, machine-readable files, etc."* (7, p. 8).

It is also mentioned that certain categories of material that are not part of the national imprint may be included - for example documents by the country's authors, documents in the language of the country, documents about the country, and documents otherwise related to the country published outside the country.

Besides the above cited recommendations concerning the coverage of the national bibliography, Guidelines attach great importance to the national bibliography as the basic, authoritative record of the national imprint, and that this record is prepared according to international principles and standards. It also points out the importance of compatibility between the bibliographic formats used, nationally as well as internationally. The national bibliography of each country is seen as a part of a whole: Universal Bibliographic Control, and the possibility for exchange and reuse of data world-wide.

Both the 1950 and the 1977 conferences contain recommendations for the printed national bibliography. Although the 1977 *Guidelines* also mention briefly that the national

bibliography might be published electronically and that efforts should be made to utilise the national records as input to information systems, it recommends a printed bibliography. This should be seen in the light of the fact that the purpose of the recommendations is to support the development and use of national bibliographic systems all over the world, also in countries where information technology had not - or had just recently - been introduced.

Even if many of the 1977 recommendations are still appropriate, there has been a great need for a revised view of the scope and production of the national bibliography. The technological development, including the new ways of publishing information in different electronic formats has made it urgently necessary to re-evaluate most aspects of the national bibliography: its object and domain, its foundation, the relation between national preservation and registration, etc.

New Recommendations 1998

The Copenhagen conference 1998 comprised a number of invited papers on important issues in modern national bibliography followed by panel, group and plenary discussions. The major outcome of the conference was a revised set of recommendations. The papers and the final set of recommendations are available on the IFLA server (2).

The preamble of the final recommendations contains similar preliminary statements of the frames of reference as the 1977 recommendations:

- ***Endorsing*** *the concept of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) as a long-term programme for the development of a world-wide system for the control and exchange of bibliographic information,*
- ***Emphasising*** *the need to strengthen national bibliographic control as a prerequisite for universal bibliographic control,*
- ***Recognising*** *the importance of the national bibliography as a major instrument in ensuring a full record of the national published heritage and achieving effective bibliographic control.*

But two additional paragraphs have been added pointing out the responsibility of the national bibliographic agency and underlining the importance of legal deposit:

- ***Affirming*** *that national libraries and national bibliographic agencies may work co-operatively with other agencies but that the overall responsibility for co-ordination and implementation of standards should rest with the national bibliographic agency,*
- ***Reaffirming*** *the value of legal deposit as a means of ensuring that the cultural and intellectual heritage and linguistic diversity of the State is preserved and made accessible for current and future users.*

Some of the most important changes as compared with the 1977 recommendations are:

Legal deposit (Recommendations 1-3)

While the former recommendations only used words such as "examine" and "consider" the new recommendations point out that legal deposit regulations as the basis for national bibliographic services are a matter of urgency:

- *"States should, as a matter of urgency, examine existing deposit legislation and consider its provisions in relation to present and future requirements; and, where necessary, existing legislation should be revised "* (Recommendation 1)
- *"States currently without legal deposit legislation are urged to introduce it"* (Recommendation 2)

Coverage of the national bibliography (Recommendations 4-5)

In stead of pointing at certain types of documents to be covered by the national bibliography the new recommendations indicate that it should include the current national output, i.e. all documents published in the country whether in print, audio-visual or electronic formats.

- *National bibliographies should include the current national output, and where practicable they should provide retrospective coverage. When necessary, selection criteria should be defined and published by the national bibliographic agency* (Recommendation 4).

The comprehensive coverage is of course an ideal but it recognises that important parts of the "national heritage" today are published in non-book formats. In terms of bibliographic control the "new" types of publication, including also Internet documents, should be handled alongside the more traditional content of a national bibliography.

The presentation and timeliness of the national bibliography (Recommendations 6-10)

While the 1977 recommendations were concerned only with the printed bibliography, the new recommendations accept that national bibliographies now are published in a variety of formats. It is also worth noticing that the needs of the users, including the users with special needs (e.g. visually handicapped), are emphasised.

- *"Given the availability of a variety of formats with which to distribute the national bibliography, national bibliographic services should use one or more appropriate to meet the needs of their users, including the users with special needs, and these formats should follow internationally- approved standards. At least one of the formats used to distribute the national bibliography should be capable of meeting archiving and preservation needs of the national bibliography and should be permanently accessible"* (Recommendation 6).
- *"The bibliographic records included in the national bibliography should be based on international standards and arranged in an appropriate manner and with access points which satisfy the needs of the users, in accordance with the characteristics of the format(s) used for distribution"* (Recommendation 10)

International standards used (Recommendations 11-15)

In general the new recommendations underlines the importance of internationally approved standards and principles.

- *"The national bibliographic agency should undertake responsibility for preparing comprehensive bibliographic records of the national imprint (or co-ordinating their preparation), and should adopt national and international standards and principles for cataloguing, identification systems such as ISBN and ISSN, script conversion, authority control, classification schemes, metadata and permanent naming of digital objects"* (Recommendation 11).

It is also pointed out that the national bibliographic agencies should adopt the components of the Basic Level Record recommended in the final report of the IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records.

Further it is recommended that the national bibliographic agencies should be pro-active in the updating and maintenance of existing standards and principles and in the development of new bibliographic tools.

Future activities (Recommendations 16-23)

This part of the 1998 recommendations calls upon IFLA as well as the national bibliographic

agencies to undertake a number of responsibilities and activities necessary to the development of national bibliographic services in the future.

IFLA is encouraged to:

- support revision of existing sets of guidelines to make provision for all new and future forms of publication
- promote studies into issuing multinational bibliographies in areas where for any reason it is not feasible at present to publish national bibliographies
- encourage intergovernmental and international non-governmental organisations to record their publications in bibliographies, according to internationally agreed standards
- assist national bibliographic agencies to develop their national bibliographic activities, where needed, by for example establishing pilot schemes to develop national bibliographies, establishing guidelines for producing national bibliographies, and organising national, regional or international seminars and training workshops.

The national bibliographic agencies are encouraged to:

- be proactive in promoting new bibliographic standards and new legal deposit legislation, including holding seminars and training courses in order to ensure that both professionals and end-users are familiar with the new practices
- regularly evaluate their success in fulfilling the recommendations.

Conclusion

The major outcome of ICNBS 1998 is the revised set of recommendations that take into account today's new technologies and media. The actual implementation of the recommendations will of course depend on local circumstances and resources. But, it seems to me that the interest expressed from all over the world has confirmed that the national bibliography plays an important role - both as a record of the national published heritage and as a contribution to universal bibliographic control. It has also shown that international recommendations are important tools for the national bibliographic agencies in persuading the governments to grant adequate resources for the national bibliography. Therefore, and because of the dynamic development of information technology and publishing industry, a review and updating of the present recommendations will probably be necessary within a few years.

References

1. Responsible for the professional planning of the conference was the ICNBS Planning Committee with Ross Bourne (former the British Library) as Chair. The other members of the committee are: Marcelle Beaudiquez (Bibliotheque national de France), Barbara Bell (The College of Wooster, Ohio, USA), Francoise Bourdon (Bibliotheque national de France), Mona Madsen (Royal School of Library and Information Science, Denmark), Ingrid Parent (National Library of Canada) and Marie-France Plassard (IFLA UBCIM Programme).

2. All the papers, the final recommendations and the pre-conference booklet are available on the IFLA Server at IFLA UBCIM Programme (http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/icnbs/icnbs.htm). The Conference Proceedings including revised versions of the papers, the panel presentations, a summary of the group discussions and the final recommendations will be published by the Royal Library in 1999.

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